

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BENNETT. Parliamentary inquiry: What is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are 8 minutes remaining in morning business that the Senator may consume or yield back.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, given that opportunity, I will consume a few of those minutes to respond to the conversations about Iraq.

I was in this body when we went to S-407 and heard the intelligence community brief us on the manufacture of chemical weapons taking place at what appeared to be a pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan. We were told repeatedly by high officials of the administration this was a plant producing weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons; it had to be taken out by a cruise missile. Some of us asked to see the intelligence. We asked to know exactly what it was that led the administration to believe this was in fact a chemical plant.

As we were given that intelligence, I found myself questioning it. I walked away from that meeting saying to myself: This is a little bit thin. There is not a lot of substance here. But administration officials were very emphatic in saying, no, we have gone through the intelligence. It is very firm. We have to take this out.

The administration in this instance, of course, was the Clinton administration. The intelligence being presented to us was being presented by Secretary Cohen, the Secretary of Defense. We now know the intelligence was wrong. This was not, in fact, a factory for weapons of mass destruction. It was, rather, a pharmaceutical plant, just as the people said it was.

We blew it up nonetheless. We killed some people with the cruise missiles we threw in there. After recognizing the intelligence was wrong, we apologized, as indeed we should.

The question I would ask those who are now raising the issue about intelligence in Iraq would be this: Would they suggest the result of our actions in Iraq called for an American apology? Are they suggesting we should apologize to the people of Iraq for having taken out Saddam Hussein and, when we find him, replace him in power?

This is a man who killed 300,000 of his own people. We have uncovered the mass graves. This is a man responsible for over 1 million additional deaths in the two wars he started with his neighbors.

This is a man who has destroyed his own country. This is a man who has raped and brutalized those of his citi-

zens whom he has not killed. This is a man who was willing to pay \$25,000 to anyone who would wrap himself in dynamite and blow himself up, as long as he took some others with him. This is a man who had weapons of mass destruction and has used them against his own people. This is a man whose actions are clearly in violation of the U.N. Resolution 1441.

Am I supposed to apologize for having supported an effort to remove him just because some people are challenging the details of the intelligence that led us to this action? I do not apologize for one moment for supporting the war or for supporting the supplemental to pay for the war, because the consequences of the action we have taken have liberated over 20 million people and made the neighborhood in which Saddam Hussein lived substantially safer for all of the neighbors around him.

This is not similar to the case of the blowing up of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan because the intelligence was faulty, which took place in the Clinton administration. This is an action that history will look back upon and say we did the right thing.

With that, I yield back the remainder of morning business time.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### AGRICULTURAL, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to H.R. 2673, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2673) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah is recognized.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all after the enacting clause be stricken, that amendment No. 2072, which is the text of Calendar No. 216, S. 1427, the Senate committee-reported bill, be inserted in lieu thereof, that the bill, as amended, be considered as original text for the purpose of further amendments, and that no points of order be waived by reason of this agreement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I am pleased to present the Agriculture appropriations subcommittee report to

the full Senate and to recommend passage of this bill. I am very grateful to the ranking member, Senator KOHL, and his professional staff.

It has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my service in the Senate to see how Senator KOHL's staff and our staff have been integrated and have performed as truly professional staffs, regardless of any partisan affiliation. I think one of the reasons the bill moved as smoothly as it did through subcommittee and full committee is that the staffs have worked together in such a professional way. I am grateful to Senator KOHL for his wisdom in the people he has chosen, and I am grateful to them for the professional way in which they have handled it.

The bill is at the 302(b) discretionary allocation level of \$17.005 billion. That is \$873 million less than the fiscal 2003 level, which was \$17.878 billion.

It is always difficult to bring an appropriations bill to the floor that has an allocation lower than the previous year and, in this case, it is almost \$1 billion lower. That has made the challenge of putting the bill together extremely difficult and, once again, underscores the accomplishments of the professional staff as they have dealt with this challenge.

To run through the various titles of the bill and help people understand what we are talking about, I will give you the following numbers.

On title I, dealing with agricultural programs, we have a total of \$26.776 billion, of which \$20.658 billion is mandatory. This is \$1.318 million more than fiscal year 2003.

On food safety, it is \$783.761 million, which is an increase of \$28.9 million over fiscal 2003. The Agricultural Research Service is at \$1.092 billion. The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service is at \$1.118 billion. The Animal and Plant Inspection Service, APHIS, is at \$711 million. That takes care of title I.

Title II, conservation programs, come in at a total of \$973 million, which is \$48 million less than fiscal 2003. Conservation operations are at \$826.635 million.

Title III, rural economic and community development programs, the total appropriated funds will be \$2.588 billion, which will support a loan level of \$4.353 billion. Single-family housing is at the \$4.084 billion level. The Rural Community Advancement Program is at \$769.479 million. Distance learning, telemedicine, and broadband is at \$685.963 million.

Title IV, domestic food programs, there is a total of \$44.088 billion, of which \$39.164 billion is mandatory. This is \$2.197 billion more than fiscal 2003. Food stamps will be funded at \$27.745 billion. WIC, Women, Infants, and Children, will be funded at \$4.639 billion.

Title V, foreign assistance and related programs, there is a total of \$1.486 billion, which is \$349 million less than fiscal year 2003, which included supplemental funding of \$369 million.

Title I, development food assistance, is \$131.67 million.

Title II, emergency food assistance, is \$1.192 billion. McGovern-Dole international food for education and child nutrition, which is a new discretionary account, is funded at \$25 million.

On the overall bill, title VI, related agencies and the Food and Drug Administration, this is an increase. It is \$1.482 billion, \$16 million more than in fiscal 2003.

The Food and Drug Administration gets \$1.39 billion in direct appropriations, plus an additional \$302 million in user fees.

The committee provides \$10 million toward the Government's share of the medical device review user fee program.

Finally, title VII, general provisions, the committee includes limitations on several farm bill mandatory programs. We do not freeze these programs at a level below fiscal 2003, and we do no harm to existing programs by these limitations.

The committee did not include a limitation on the mandatory funding level for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EQIP.

Now, in the bill, there are necessary pay costs for employees covered: \$131.208 million.

I will make a personal and parochial observation with respect to this bill. Utah is in its fifth year of the worst drought in memory, which is a situation shared by many Western colleagues. We have not provided emergency funding for the drought, but we have made substantial investments in farm programs and conservation efforts that we think will help producers deal with these weather-related disasters.

This is an appropriations bill, not an authorizing bill. I know there is a strong temptation to use appropriations bills as a vehicle to catch up on authorization situations. Senator KOHL and I have agreed that we will oppose any authorizing amendment regardless of how salutary it may be, unless it has been cleared by both the chairman and the ranking member of the appropriate authorizing committee.

I am grateful to Senator KOHL for his willingness and leadership on this particular issue. We have done our best to accommodate Member requests in this bill. This is not always possible. The fact that we are almost \$1 billion less than fiscal 2003 makes it difficult. We have done our best to be as fair as we can and as complete as we can. If there are any funding amendments, therefore, offered on the floor, they must be offset.

It is the desire of the leadership, Senator FRIST and Senator DASCHLE, to finish this bill today. I think that can be done. But if it is to be done, we are going to have to have full cooperation of all of the Senators. We know of some of the amendments that have been proposed. We have done our best to deal with those amendments at the staff level and in the committee by having

conversations and occasionally colloquies. But we understand there are some amendments that will be proposed, will be debated, and will be voted on.

I ask for the cooperation of all of my colleagues and that, first, they come to the floor in a timely fashion to offer their amendments; secondly, that they would understand we need to move through these amendments as quickly as possible in order to meet the leadership's request that we finish the bill tonight. I am hoping we can finish it in good time tonight. We will stay, as I understand it from Leader FRIST, as long as we have to stay to get the bill done.

While the time seems to be hanging heavily on people's hands right now, I hope they will come to the floor and offer their amendments now, rather than rushing in at 10:30 tonight and saying: I have an amendment, and I need to have it brought up.

I will do my best to allow full and fair debate on each amendment, but I am prepared to offer a tabling motion if it appears to me all of the arguments have been made. I believe we know which are the more controversial amendments. I have talked with people who stand on both sides of those amendments and suggested to them the arguments have been made; there is really nothing new to be said about it. While we did get the information on the record, we really need to come to a conclusion and move on these particular amendments.

I don't think there is any amendment on which a Senator is undecided. I think the controversial amendments have been sufficiently discussed prior to coming to the floor so that everyone pretty much knows where he or she stands.

I will use the tabling motion judiciously. I will not attempt to cut anybody off or violate his or her privileges, but I will do what I can to keep the bill moving in a timely fashion.

AMENDMENT NO. 2073

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk on behalf of myself and Senator KOHL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Utah [Mr. BENNETT], for himself and Mr. KOHL, proposes an amendment numbered 2073.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

On page 47, line 13, insert a period after "\$335,963,000" and strike the remainder of the sentence, and on page 48, lines 7 through 9, strike all after "transmission in" and insert in lieu thereof the following: "rural areas eligible for Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program benefits authorized by 7 U.S.C. 950aaa."

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I understand Senator KOHL is on his way

and will be here shortly. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the fiscal year 2004 appropriations bill for Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies. This year, the subcommittee faced a difficult task. The allocation provided to the subcommittee, just over \$17 billion in discretionary funding, was a significant decrease from the fiscal year 2003 funding level. Our new chairman, Senator BENNETT, worked extremely hard to balance priorities in this bill with limited funding. It has been a pleasure to work with him, and I appreciate the good job that he has done.

I would like to briefly mention some of the highlights of this bill.

Continued funding has been provided for important research projects ranging from nutrition issues to the control of emerging diseases. As we witnessed the devastating economic effect that one case of mad cow disease had on Canada, the importance of knowing all we can about it and making certain that our borders are protected becomes very clear. Further, outbreaks of Chronic Wasting Disease and West Nile Virus demonstrate how small the world has become, and research funded in this bill plays an integral role in keeping America prepared.

Continued funding has also been provided for ongoing conservation projects across the country. The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides basic services to help ensure that agriculture and our natural resources can fully complement each other. Risks from drought and flooding are reduced due to activities carried out by the NRCS. In recent years and recent days, it seems nearly every community in America has been faced with one or the other, and the NRCS, along with the Farm Service Agency, has played a vital role in protecting and assisting affected communities.

Funding has been provided to improve food safety, including funding for the Food Safety and Inspection Service to hire an additional 87 food safety inspectors and foreign program auditors. Funding for additional training, to improve the scientific and surveillance skills of these inspectors, as well as improved laboratory capability to ensure that they have access to modern equipment, is also included in this bill. The Food and Drug Administration is provided funding to improve monitoring of the food industry, improve the FDA's laboratory preparedness, and to implement the recently mandated Food Registration System.

For rural development, this bill provides adequate resources to continue

the important programs that include homeownership, essential community facilities, water and waste assistance, business loan and grant programs. The committee has also provided sufficient funds for farm credit programs, which are essential to farmers who could not obtain funding from the commercial sector for ownership and operating loans.

The bill provides sufficient funding for the WIC program to support a monthly participation level of approximately 7.8 million low-income women, infants and children, the same participation level requested in the budget. This level includes funding for several initiatives requested by the President, and includes \$25 million for the popular WIC Farmers' Market program and a \$125 million contingency fund. Funding for the food stamp program and the commodity supplemental food program is also provided in this bill.

Funding for the child nutrition programs, which include school breakfast, school lunch, the child and adult care feeding program, and the summer food service program, is included at the President's request level. In previous years, I have worked to include several provisions in this bill to expand the availability of these important programs. This year, due to the scheduled reauthorization of the child nutrition programs, these provisions are not included. Instead, I have been working with the chairman and ranking member of the Agriculture Committee to have these provisions included permanently in child nutrition reauthorization.

The FDA is funded in this bill at sufficient levels to continue its mission of promoting and protecting the public health. Increased funding is provided for the food safety items I previously mentioned, as well as patient safety activities, medical device review, over the counter drugs, generic drugs, and pharmaceuticals for children. Last year, consumers spent nearly \$1.5 trillion dollars on FDA-regulated products. The work done there is vital to this country, and the nearly \$1.4 billion in funding provided to the agency reflects that importance.

I believe that more could be done with additional funding. However, with the dollars available, the chairman has put together a good bill that I fully support. I would like to thank Senator BENNETT for his leadership and hard work, as well as the hard work of his staff Pat Raymond, Fitzhugh Elder, Hunter Moorhead, and Dianne Preece. It is hard to believe that this is their first year working on this bill. Their expertise and professionalism would indicate that they had many years experience on this subcommittee.

Again, I strongly support this bill, and I urge all Members to vote for its passage.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I commend the distinguished Chairman and the Ranking Member for bringing the Senate a carefully crafted spending bill

within the subcommittee's 302(b) allocation and consistent with the discretionary spending cap for 2004.

The Senate reported bill provides \$17.0 billion in discretionary budget authority and \$17.6 billion in discretionary outlays for fiscal year 2004 for the Department of Agriculture. This is 8.5 percent less than last year in discretionary budget authority and 1.6 percent less than last year in discretionary outlays. This bill also provides \$55.5 billion in mandatory budget authority and \$39.5 billion in mandatory outlays in fiscal year 2004 for the Department of Agriculture.

The Senate reported bill is at the subcommittee's 302(b) allocation for budget authority and \$171 million in outlays below the 302(b) allocation. The bill provides \$1.57 billion less in budget authority and \$279 million less in outlays than the FY 2003 level and \$22 million more in BA and \$96 million less in outlays than the President's request.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a table displaying the Budget Committee scoring of the bill be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 1427, AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS, 2004.—  
SPENDING COMPARISONS—SENATE-REPORTED BILL  
(Fiscal year 2004 \$ millions)

|   | General purpose | Mandatory | Total  |
|---|-----------------|-----------|--------|
| <b>Senate-reported bill:</b>            |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 17,005          | 55,536    | 72,541 |
| Outlays .....                           | 17,632          | 39,472    | 57,104 |
| <b>Senate Committee allocation:</b>     |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 17,005          | 55,536    | 72,541 |
| Outlays .....                           | 17,803          | 39,472    | 57,275 |
| <b>2003 level:</b>                      |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 18,575          | 52,763    | 71,338 |
| Outlays .....                           | 17,911          | 40,712    | 58,623 |
| <b>President's request:</b>             |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 16,983          | 55,536    | 72,519 |
| Outlays .....                           | 17,728          | 39,472    | 57,200 |
| <b>House-passed bill:</b>               |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 17,004          | 55,143    | 72,147 |
| Outlays .....                           | 17,657          | 39,142    | 56,799 |
| <b>Senate-Reported Bill Compared To</b> |                 |           |        |
| <b>Senate 302(b) allocation:</b>        |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 0               | 0         | 0      |
| Outlays .....                           | -171            | 0         | -171   |
| <b>2003 level:</b>                      |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | -1,570          | 2,773     | 1,203  |
| Outlays .....                           | -279            | -1,240    | -1,519 |
| <b>President's request:</b>             |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 22              | 0         | 22     |
| Outlays .....                           | -96             | 0         | -96    |
| <b>House-passed bill:</b>               |                 |           |        |
| Budget authority .....                  | 1               | 393       | 394    |
| Outlays .....                           | -25             | 330       | 305    |

Note: Details may not add to totals due to rounding. Totals adjusted for consistency with scorekeeping conventions.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, the Senate is now considering the fiscal year 2004 Agriculture, rural development, and related agencies appropriations bill, and I would like to speak on the issue of increased funding provisions related to the treatment of animals.

Two agencies in the Department of Agriculture are charged with the responsibility of carrying out regulatory programs to protect animals from mistreatment, called for under the Animal Welfare Act and the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act. The Animal Welfare Act is enforced by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act

enforced by the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

The need for this increase in funding and commitment is due, in part, to media reports above livestock being raised in unspeakable conditions where they did not even have room to lie down, and about animal slaughter operations where animals are not properly stunned before beginning the process of dismemberment. While the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and certain state authorities, did initiate investigations regarding some of the more egregious reports, I understand that those charges were dismissed due to evidentiary problems, leaving unanswered the actual degree of severity to which humane slaughter regulations were violated in the reported cases, or the degree to which similar violations occur throughout the Nation.

During consideration of the fiscal year 2003 omnibus appropriations bill, the Senate included, at my request, \$5 million for the hiring of at least 50 additional humane slaughter inspectors. Report language accompanying that bill instructed these new inspectors to work solely on the enforcement of the Humane Slaughter Act.

Prior to the \$1.25 million allocation in the fiscal year 2001 supplemental appropriations bill for the hiring of 17 district veterinary medical specialists at the Food Safety Inspection Service to work solely on the enforcement of the Humane Slaughter Act, there were no inspectors employed exclusively for this purpose.

On May 7, 2003, the Secretary of Agriculture testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture regarding the administration's fiscal year 2004 budget request. At that hearing, I asked the Secretary about the hiring of additional Food Safety Inspection Service inspectors for which funding had been appropriated in the previously enacted appropriations bill; however, it became apparent that the Department had yet to hire any new inspectors.

As a result of continued interest in this matter, the Senate Appropriations Committee included additional report language clarifying the funding provided in fiscal year 2003 regarding the Department's goal for hiring 38 new inspectors by the end of fiscal year 2003. As of October 28, 2003, this goal was met, and I understand that the remaining 12 inspectors will be hired by the end of this calendar year.

The fiscal year 2004 Senate Agriculture appropriations bill provides statutory language to continue funding for the 50 humane slaughter inspectors and the 17 district veterinary medical specialists, and outlines the Committee's expectation that this funding will be included in the Department's fiscal year 2005 budget request.

I strongly believe that much work remains to be done. I believe that continued attention should be placed on enforcement on both the Animal Welfare Act and the Humane Methods of

Slaughter Act to put a stop to the mistreatment of animals.

Mr. President, I thank the chairman and ranking member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee for their support in this every important effort.

#### STATUS OF APPROPRIATIONS BILLS

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, as Members are aware, all 13 appropriations bills have cleared the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Four bills have been sent to the President for signature, of which three have been signed into law. The Defense, Homeland Security, and Legislative Branch appropriations bills have been signed, and the Interior appropriations bill is awaiting signature.

Five appropriations bills are in conference. These are the Military Construction, Energy and Water Development, Labor-HHS-Education, Foreign Operations, and Transportation and Treasury appropriations bills. The Military Construction appropriations bill completed conference yesterday, and the Energy and Water Development conference met today.

Four appropriations bills are awaiting completion of Senate action—Agriculture, VA-HUD, Commerce-Justice-State, and the District of Columbia. The Agriculture appropriations bill is being considered on the floor today.

Mr. President, the Senate should proceed to process these four final bills on the floor and to send them to conference with the House. This will protect our rights as Senators to offer amendments. The Senate should process 13 individual appropriations bills, and avoid an omnibus appropriations bill. Omnibus appropriations bills have the effect of shoehorning large segments of the Federal Government into one monstrous bill. Members' rights to amend legislation are severely limited, and they will not be able to know what they are voting for or against. Omnibus appropriations legislation also has the result of bringing the White House to the table, which has the effect of blurring the distinction between the responsibilities of the executive branch and the constitutional responsibilities of the legislative branch to develop legislation under the separation of powers. This is no way to legislate.

I thank and commend the distinguished chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Mr. STEVENS, for his steadfast pursuit of the goal of processing 13 individual appropriations bills. The Senate would not be at this stage of processing the appropriations bills, if my friend, the Senator from Alaska, had not pursued this matter with such vigor on his side.

Again, I thank my distinguished and able colleague, Mr. STEVENS, for his efforts.

#### RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE BROADBAND LOAN PROGRAM

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I support the effort spearheaded by my col-

leagues, Senator BURNS and Senator DORGAN, and have serious objections to the Bush administration's proposal to gut the only national program we've ever enacted to get broadband high speed Internet connectivity deployed across our country.

It was just last year that Congress passed, as part of the farm bill, the only national broadband deployment incentive I am aware of that has been enacted by the Federal Government—a program that was supposed to provide over \$700 million in loans a year to help get broadband to all parts of the country—\$700 million in loans a year to help create and bring jobs to rural parts of the country—\$700 million a year to help improve health care and education delivery to places like Upstate New York, rural Montana, North Dakota, Alaska, Iowa, and all across the country—\$700 million a year to help improve emergency communications systems so that our first responders can actually receive those calls for help.

From a fiscal perspective, you couldn't ask for a better deal. It takes just \$20 million in Federal resources to leverage over \$700 million in loans—\$700 million in loans plus at least another 20 percent in investment from the private sector. Has the program been popular? You better believe it has. In just 9 months since the Rural Utilities Service published regulations for the broadband loan program, the RUS has received applications that total over \$1 billion. Our rural communities across the country recognize the promise of new telecommunications technologies.

Our rural communities and the coalition of Members from Congress that helped create the RUS broadband loan program in last year's farm bill aren't the only ones who recognize the promise of broadband. Look what other countries are doing.

A recent study by the International Telecommunications Union, the UN's telecommunications agency, confirmed what many of us already know. South Korea is leading the world in numbers of high-speed Internet connections per capita, with Hong Kong and Canada coming in at second and third. Where is the U.S. a distant 11th.

And these other countries are outspending us on broadband infrastructure. Sweden has set aside some \$800 million on broadband deployment in rural areas of the country. France is following suit, having announced not long ago its plans to invest \$1.5 billion on broadband infrastructure over 5 years. In Japan, through the majority government owned Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, the country is in the middle of a huge fiber-to-the-home project across the country. In Korea, the government is laying out some \$15 billion to provide an optical fiber connection to 84 percent of homes by 2005.

We are falling behind. I don't know about the rest of my colleagues, but I think that's a huge problem. People in

upstate New York know it's a huge problem. There is little disputing that a nation with ubiquitous broadband will be more efficient and productive than a nation without it. Just a couple weeks ago, the Wall Street Journal had a story titled, What's Slowing Us Down?, with the byline, "Broadband is seen as a critical part of the national economy. Yet the U.S. lags behind other countries."

The Wall Street Journal piece points out that, "Rising rates of high-speed Internet access are expected to trigger everything from increased sales of new computers to a massive rise in worker productivity." A recent Brookings Institution study found that universal broadband access could add \$300 billion a year to the U.S. economy. Forgoing a major broadband rollout, the Wall Street Journal notes, might not only hinder economic growth, but also worsen an already bleak picture for battered telecommunications and high-tech industries.

That explains the letter that a host of companies and high-tech associations have sent to Senators BENNETT and KOHL, the managers on this important bill. This letter pleading to restore funding of the RUS broadband loan program is signed by 3M, Alcatel, Cisco Systems, Corning, Intel, Nortel Networks, Siemens, and so many others who recognize the importance of this modest investment.

But they are not the only ones we're hearing from. I am hearing from small carriers across New York who need assistance to get broadband deployed to their rural areas—companies like Castle Cable Television in Alexandria Bay, NY who want to do the right thing—who recognize the potential of broadband to bring jobs and better services to their communities.

So what is our plan, our national strategy to help ensure broadband gets deployed across America? What is our plan to ensure America's competitiveness? Well, the administration's plan and the one that's come out of committee in the Senate is to crush the one permanent broadband deployment program the Federal government has ever enacted.

I understand that we have replaced \$10 million that would leverage over \$350 million in broadband loans with \$10 million in grants. That doesn't make any sense. I am not suggesting we not do grants—but it doesn't make fiscal sense to saw off \$10 million that will leverage over \$350 million in loans for a simple \$10 million in grants.

And it certainly doesn't make sense to take away the Rural Utilities Service's administrative funding and capacity to process and review the pending applications. Rural communities across the country, like Alex Bay in New York, need these resources to create and attract jobs. And our country needs to make these investments if we're to stay ahead of—or at least competitive with—South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, and our neighbors to the